

THE
COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

NUMBER XXXI.

TUESDAY, 7 May, 1793.

Hæc mihi Stertinus, sapientum octavus. HOR.

This from Stertinus came, a modern sage,

Mr. COUNTRY SPECTATOR,

THOUGH I am aware, that you hold yourself most deeply indebted to those of your Correspondents, who address you on subjects peculiar to the Country, I doubt not, that you will pay some portion of regard to writers, who offer you any thing that is new, or that promises to be useful to the majority of your Readers. I imagine, it was never your design to make a perfect rustic of your Muse; nor is it to be supposed, that topics entirely foreign to the Metropolis are to engage the whole attention of a *Country Spectator*. You will have sufficiently fulfilled your engagement with the Public by giving your work a sort of Country cast, and by convincing

all, who take up your Papers, that few of them were written within the sound of *Bow-Bell's*.

BUT great as is the difference between Town and Country manners, there must be very many circumstances, in which they both agree. Amongst a thousand other instances, which might be alledged, *speech* is common both to Citizens and those, who live in the remoter Provinces: and tho' in various parts of the kingdom, they do not use the same mode of pronunciation, they employ the same words in nearly the same sense.

Now none of the writers on the theory of language, as *Harris*, *Horne Tooke*, or *Lord Monboddo*, have, as far as I recollect, given the world a critical disquisition on the force and propriety of the words Yes and No; though, I doubt not, that they afford ample room for speculation, and that much might be said on them not generally known. It is obvious, indeed, that all men understand the meaning of these words, from the frequent occasion, which they have to pronounce them: yet, in spite of their better knowledge, they very often misapply them, and say Yes, when reason would teach them to say No.

Yes and No, tho' seemingly insignificant monosyllables, are certainly the two most important words in our tongue. Either of them is a sentence of itself, and is deemed a full and sufficient answer to an

harangue of an hour's length. Proofs of the truth of this assertion may be had any day during the Session of Parliament, when the long speeches of gentlemen for and against Ministry are of effect only according as the AYES or NOES are on their side of the question. Other proofs too might be adduced ; but after having quoted the high authority of the Commons of Great Britain, to descend to minuter examples would in Criticism be thought an *anticlimax*, and in Politics a *libel*.

Of these two words, however, I must confess that No has, in my opinion, a decided pre-eminence. Yes is, indeed, a very serviceable monosyllable, and on many occasions we could not do without it. Thus, in the Marriage Ceremony, if there were no method of signifying assent, the service would, like "*Tb' adventure of the Bear and fiddle Be sung, but break off in the middle.*" But, in general, we are not asked to comply with any request, where compliance will be attended with advantage to ourselves. Sometimes, even in the case just cited, a refusal might be productive of much greater happiness to the parties concerned, and "I will not" would be a more prudent answer to the Minister's interrogation than "I will." But on most other occasions the Petitioner has his own interest solely at heart ; and the interests of mankind are so widely different, and in many cases, so incompatible, that by saying Yes to any question put to us, it is above an hundred to

one, that we involve ourselves in difficulties. Most of the people, who make requests, are apt to be unreasonable; and whatever they may tell us of mutual benefits, we may lay it down as a rule, which will seldom deceive us, that the benefit will be certain to themselves, but to us only accidental: or at least, that the *probability* is on their side, while the *possibility* only is on ours.

It appears, then, I hope, very plainly, that *No* is the most useful little word, ever invented, without any exception whatever throughout the whole range of language. And yet it is surprising, that people frequently have an aversion to pronouncing this word, and say *Yes* instead of it, tho' the pronunciation of the latter is not more easy, but is to some persons more difficult on account of the letter *Y*. I will subjoin a list of examples, in which people are apt to say *Yes* instead of *No*, always to their great detriment, and often to their utter ruin.

SOME men have the misfortune to be trusted with secrets, and are solicited by inquisitive persons to divulge them. To so intimate friends and to men of so profound secrecy "*they cannot say No.*" In a few days the secret is no secret at all, but the parties concerned hear it from all quarters.—The consequence is:—You get the character of a babbler, and your friend is exposed to all manner of inconvenience.

THE firm of a house in business is A, B and C. C is admitted into partnership on terms of perfect equality with the others; but being the younger partner, A and B take their amusements five days out of the seven, hoping that C will attend to the customers. C "*cannot say No.*"—The consequence:—C has one third of the profits of the business, and above two thirds of the trouble.

PEERS, Ministers, &c. &c. who have preference in their gift, have twenty solicitations for every place, which is likely soon to be vacant. Each Petitioner brings his friend with him, a man to whom they "*cannot say No :*" so the place is promised to twenty applicants and nineteen are disappointed.—The consequence:—an opinion in the world, that great men's promises are not always to be relied on.

THE writers of Magazines, Periodical Papers, &c. advertise for Correspondence. Scribblers, who can scarcely spell, send their crudities to the unfortunate Editor, with a fulsome panegyric on his learning, wit, &c. together with an entreaty that he will notice their communications. They are so very modest, that he "*cannot say No.*"—The consequence:—some Critic unhappily stumbles on their nonsense and damns the whole work.

IN Senates all regard to the welfare of the state is superseded by the consideration, that certain friends,

on the other side of the house, wish you to vote with them. You "*cannot say No.*" The consequence :—

A SIMPLE Country girl has had the honor of being smiled upon by the Squire of the Parish. Gradually he proceeds to tamper with her virtue. She blushes, but "*cannot say No.*"—The consequence:—A few months splendour, succeeded by infamy and want.

Two friends dispute over a bottle at a tavern. One of them is provoked to let fall some expression, of which he afterwards most heartily repents. The other demands satisfaction. The aggressor "*cannot say No.*"—The consequence:—A thrust thro' the body, either to his friend or to himself.

SUCH, Sir, are the mischievous consequences of *not being able to say No*, at all: but there are many persons, who can pronounce the word, yet so very ill, that they might, on all occasions, almost as well say YES. I have often amused myself with observing the various ways of uttering dissent. One man articulates the negative very distinctly, but holds down his head, as if he feared to meet your eye. If you wish to gain your point with such an one, do not rest satisfied with the first refusal: your case is by no means desperate.—Another will drawl out his dis-

fent, and is longer in pronouncing No than any other word in the language. A second solicitation will make him say Yes in exactly the same tone.— Again, there are others, who speak the word with great ease, and seem to think that they shall evince the strength of their resolution by a double negative (No! No!) This is generally accompanied with so fierce a look, as to deter us from repeating the request: else, had we courage to renew the attack, the victory would be pretty certain. I do not mean to quibble with the wag, who remarked that two negatives make an affirmative: but this dissent is mostly the result of impetuosity rather than of firmness, and if it be opposed with solicitation or remonstrance, it is followed with refusals still fainter and fainter, till it concludes with a "VERY WELL."

IN short, Sir, the only negative, which carries with it the marks of earnestness and decision, is a plain simple No. All quick repetitions of it take away from its force and lessen its effect. It is to be spoken with dignity and ease, in an accent neither sad nor tremulous. The person of the speaker should be erect, his countenance serene and composed, and his eye fixt on the party addressed. To a single No thus delivered few persons will be so hardy as to make any reply: but should the interrogator still persist, let the No be repeated after certain intervals in exactly the same manner. Against firmness,

like this, all attempts will be fruitless, and Impudence itself will retire abashed.

As I have so fully stated the inconveniences arising from an inability *to say No*, or even from saying it ill, these rules will not be deemed frivolous or useless. On the contrary, children should be taught them among the rudiments of learning. They comprise the whole extent of human prudence, and if rightly applied, might produce all the comforts proceeding from the rectitude of moral conduct.

EVERY one has heard of the *Seven Wise Men* of Greece, whose sayings, tho' some of them shew no depth of penetration, have been handed down to the present day. If there were *Wise Men* in this age, or if their sayings were likely to be recorded, I should hope to have my name immortalized by posterity, for being the author of the aphorism "*Learn to say No.*"

Y^r. reader, admirer, and well-wisher,
London. *Negativus Laconicus.*
 1 May, 1793. S.

To a Correspondent.

On a second perusal of P. P.'s communication, the C. S. is sorry to observe, that it contains scarcely an idea, which is not to be found in all the writers on the same subject, from HERBERT, the author of *The Country Parson*, down to PALEY in his Chapter on *Professional Afflance*. To reject the papers of any Correspondents, especially of those, who display the goodness and benevolence of P. P., is the most unpleasant part of the C. S.'s undertaking. It is, nevertheless, a duty, which he owes to his Readers as well as to himself.